

ARIZONA *Our history* LATINA *Our story* TRAILBLAZERS

Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination

Vol V





Narcisa Monreal Espinoza

Civil Rights Pioneer



Throughout her life Narcisa Monreal Espinoza has broken the mold of traditional roles for Latinas from her generation. Narcisa and her twin sister Sofia were born in 1923 in the mining town of Winkelman, Ariz. The Monreal family finally settled in Coolidge, where Narcisa's mother Margarita pushed all her daughters to graduate from high school, a nontraditional aspiration for Mexican daughters at the time. Against all odds in a racially segregated community, Narcisa graduated as salutatorian in 1941. It was the first in a lifetime of achievements that marked her as a leader.

Narcisa immediately left the cotton fields for Phoenix, residing with relatives and enrolling in business school. Not content to simply marry and stay in the home, she worked as a bookkeeper and cashier. Doing her part for her country, she worked as supply clerk at Williams Air Field, east of Chandler. In 1945 Narcisa received her "Reduction in

Force" notice from Williams and married Jesus "J.B." Espinoza, a Navy Seabee and her high school sweetheart. They moved back to the Florence/Eloy area and raised two children, Thomas and Cynthia.

At the age of 35, Narcisa and her family settled in Tempe. She found clerical work with the Salt River Indian Agency's Social Services Branch, but didn't stop there. Determined to get ahead in her career, Narcisa enrolled in Arizona State University. She earned a bachelor's degree in sociology at the age of 40, which led to a better paying position. While completing the degree, she became pregnant with her third daughter, Elizabeth, born in 1967.

During the 1960s Narcisa grew into a highly politicized and professional woman, with a passion to end discrimination. She drew inspiration from the Chicano movement, the farmworker movement, and the women's



movement. She responded deeply to the call for action because she understood the struggle. She and J.B. joined the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and chartered Tempe's Council #361. Narcisa rose quickly in the organization, becoming State LULAC director in 1967, the first woman to hold this position. A year later, Narcisa won the position of National Vice President. Later she even formed new councils in California and Maryland.

Narcisa's motivation, passion and knowledge didn't go unnoticed, and in 1968 the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) tapped her to train as an Equal Employment Officer. Two years later Narcisa, one of very few Latinas in this position, opened the Phoenix EEOC office as Acting Director. Under her supervision, her office investigated and mediated racial and gender discrimination cases in employment. For a decade Narcisa traveled the Valley and the state, presenting and training on the requirements of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Narcisa particularly encouraged Latinos to utilize civil rights legislation of the 1960s to demand equal treatment. Revealing a rising Chicana consciousness, she spoke

about the double discrimination of race and gender for Latinas. As a leader of the Phoenix chapter of La Comision Feminil Mexicana, she encouraged Spanish speaking women to assert their rights, to obtain higher education to better their families, and most importantly, to recognize their own potential. Many organizations provided Narcisa an audience for her eloquent speeches on the vital role women of all races should play in business, politics, education and more. She later joined the National Organization for Women, the League of Mexican American Women, Arizona Women's Political Caucus and many other groups.

In her lifelong pursuit of education and knowledge, Narcisa completed her master's degree in education in 1972, and seven years later she took a job in Maryland as Chief of the Equal Employment Complaints Department with the Department of Health and Human Services. She officially retired in 1983, but continued to work as a realtor and then as a substitute teacher into her 70s. She volunteered many hours in Tempe to promote the Latino community's history and culture. Narcisa, a proud pioneer in Arizona's civil rights history, celebrated her 90th birthday in 2013.



Arizona Latina Trailblazers: Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination
Trailblazer Series Vol V

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Latino Perspectives Magazine and the Raul H. Castro Institute (RCI) are proud to have a role in preserving the significant contributions made by the 2013 Arizona Latina Trailblazers. The mission of Latino Perspectives Magazine is to provoke, challenge, and connect Latinos who are defining, pursuing, and achieving the American Latino Dream. This mission is in concert with the Raul H. Castro Institute's vision to improve the quality of life for the Latino community in Arizona by bringing focus to priority issues of education, health and human services, leadership, and civic engagement – all areas in which these Latina Trailblazers have created a tremendous and lasting impact. Through the use of this book in educational settings and through its availability as part of the Arizona Memory Project, their legacy will be perpetuated as generations of leaders continue to be inspired by the spirit and actions of these pioneering women. It has been a privilege to tell their stories.

Thank you to the following sponsor for making this project possible:

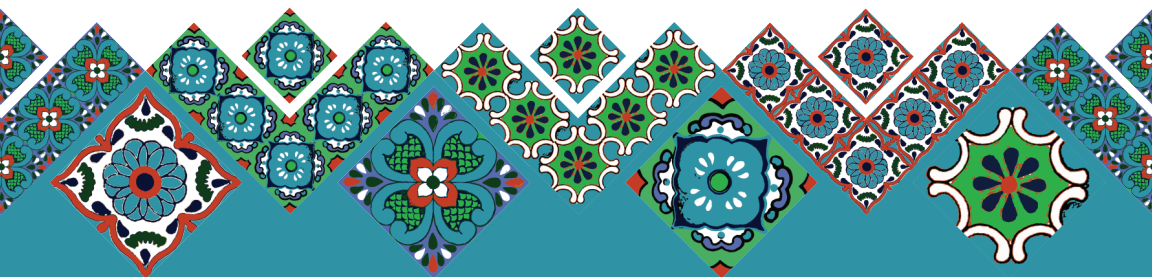


Latinas' Stories Remain Important in Arizona's History

As educators, social workers, labor leaders, entrepreneurs, scholars, judicial representatives, homemakers, nurses, ranch wives, or political representatives, Latinas and Hispanas have long been at the forefront of Arizona's history. It is important that we recognize the impact of their individual contributions, and imperative that their collective stories be recalled and shared.

The life journeys of these women are filled with compelling stories that reflect the strength of their vision, their courageous actions, and their thoughtful advocacy. Their outstanding leadership formed strong cultural cornerstones, laying the foundation for women in leadership roles today.

And so we honor them and all that they represent, pioneers who forged our rich cultural heritage and strong role models.



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